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Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force for the period from 1 March to 20 May 2016

I. Introduction

1. The present report gives an account of the activities of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) during the past three months, pursuant to the mandate contained in Security Council resolution 350 (1974) and extended in subsequent resolutions, most recently resolution 2257 (2015).

II. Situation in the area and activities of the Force

2. During the reporting period, the ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic was maintained, albeit in a continuously volatile environment attributable to the ongoing conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic and notwithstanding a significant number of violations of the Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces (Disengagement of Forces Agreement) of 1974, which are set out below. The Syrian Arab Armed Forces and non-State armed opposition groups engaged in exchanges of heavy weapon fire in the area of separation and the area of limitation. Different armed groups, including the listed terrorist group Nusrah Front and the Yarmouk Martyrs Brigade, which pledged allegiance to Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, continued to exchange fire in the UNDOF area of operation. Inside the area of separation, the presence of the Syrian armed forces and military equipment, as well as any other armed personnel and military equipment other than that of UNDOF, is in violation of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement. As underscored by the Security Council in its resolution 2257 (2015), there should be no military activity of any kind in the area of separation.

3. In employing its best efforts to maintain the ceasefire and see that it is scrupulously observed, as prescribed in the Disengagement of Forces Agreement, UNDOF reports all breaches of the ceasefire line. All incidents of firing into the area of separation and across the ceasefire line, as well as the crossing by individuals of the ceasefire line, are violations of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement. In his regular interaction with both sides, the Force Commander continued to call upon both parties to exercise restraint and prevent any miscalculations that might lead to an escalation of the situation across the ceasefire line.

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4. A number of incidents of note occurred across the ceasefire line in violation of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement. On two occasions, Israel Defense Forces soldiers fired small arms shots at persons carrying out activities close to the ceasefire line on the Bravo side. On 28 February, United Nations personnel at position 80 observed three persons on the Bravo side, close to the ceasefire line, with two of them removing metal poles from the ground. Subsequently, an Israel Defense Forces soldier on foot, approximately 700 metres from United Nations position 80, fired a single shot that impacted close to the third person, who immediately boarded a vehicle and drove off from the location with the other two individuals. On 23 March, United Nations personnel at position 80 also observed an Israel Defense Forces patrol fire two rounds of gunfire in the general direction of three persons working in a field in the area of separation close to the ceasefire line. The three persons immediately left the area in the direction of Rafid village.

5. Crossing of the ceasefire line by civilians, primarily shepherds, from the Bravo side to the Alpha side was observed on an almost daily basis. On a number of occasions on 9, 10 and 28 March and 11 April, United Nations personnel at observation post 54 observed interaction at the Israeli technical fence between the Israel Defense Forces personnel and individuals from the Bravo side, some of whom were armed. The interactions involved vehicles from the Bravo side driving to an Israeli technical fence gate. United Nations personnel at observation post 51 observed, on 20 April, five Israel Defense Forces soldiers escort an unarmed individual to a gate in the Israeli technical fence, which they subsequently opened for the unarmed person to cross from the Alpha side into the area of separation. The individual was then picked up on the Bravo side by a person in a vehicle that drove off towards the village of Ruwayhinah.

6. In the context of the Syrian conflict, intermittent exchange of gunfire between the Syrian armed forces and armed groups continued with varying degrees of intensity in the area of separation and limitation on the Bravo side. The Syrian armed forces maintained their positions in the area of separation, particularly around Ba'th and Khan Arnabah, as well as around Hadar and in the vicinity of the tri-village area of Jubbata, Turunjah and Ufana. The northern part of the area of separation saw low-level sporadic exchange of heavy machine gun and small arms fire between the Syrian armed forces and armed groups. In recent months, firing occurred particularly from the area around United Nations position 17 towards Bayt Jinn and from the general area of Hadar towards Jubbata al-Khashab. From 20 to 22 May, UNDOF observed a notable increase in direct and indirect exchange of gunfire between the Syrian armed forces and non-State armed opposition groups, in addition to several heavy explosions and detonations, in the northern and central parts of the areas of separation and limitation on the Bravo side, particularly in the vicinity of Harfa. During that period, United Nations personnel at temporary observation post 4 observed an explosion in the vicinity of Camp Faouar.

7. Further north, in the border area between Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, on 16 occasions, UNDOF observed and reported transborder movements of unidentified individuals, some of whom were armed with automatic weapons and a light machine gun.

8. The Syrian armed forces maintained their positions along the main road connecting Qunaytirah to Damascus and generally deployed tanks at locations adjacent to the area of separation. UNDOF observed non-State armed opposition

groups using tanks in the area of separation. In addition, the Syrian armed forces maintained a presence at the vacated United Nations positions 25 and 32 and observation post 72. Armed elements remained present at vacated United Nations position 10 and observation post 71.

9. In the central part of the area of separation and limitation, intermittent gunfire occurred, with a high-level exchange of fire occurring in mid-February when non-State armed opposition groups carried out offensives against the Syrian armed forces in Jaba and Masharah.

10. Throughout the reporting period, open sources reported an increase in the intensity of the clashes between the Nusrah Front and the Yarmouk Martyrs Brigade. On 21 March, the Yarmouk Martyrs Brigade and its affiliate the Muthanna Movement reportedly launched an offensive against the Nusrah Front and non-State armed opposition groups in the south-west part of the area of limitation seizing several towns and villages. These gains were reportedly reversed on 3 April when the Nusrah Front and the Free Syrian Army launched a counteroffensive. Until April, the Yarmouk Martyrs Brigade continued to conduct military training close to vacated United Nations outpost 80A. Of particular note, on 2 March, United Nations personnel at position 80 and observation post 53 went into shelter as a result of a heavy explosion in close proximity to the United Nations locations. A vehicle-borne improvised explosive devise detonated at a checkpoint manned by armed elements on the outskirts of Aishah village in the area of separation, resulting in the reported deaths of 18 people. This was the second asymmetric type of attack observed by UNDOF in the area of separation since 30 November 2015, when another such attack occurred in Qahtaniyah close to United Nations observation post 51.

11. UNDOF protested against all violations to the Disengagement of Forces Agreement by both parties, including the presence of unauthorized equipment in the area of separation and firing into the area of separation. The Force Commander reminded the parties of their obligation to abide by the terms of the Agreement and to ensure the safety and security of United Nations personnel on the ground.

12. On two occasions, UNDOF observed armed and unarmed persons digging out and removing landmines in close proximity to United Nations positions. On 24 February, United Nations personnel at observation post 53 observed two groups of persons harvesting anti-tank and anti-personnel mines approximately 800 metres from the observation post. On 26 March, United Nations personnel at position 80 also observed two persons digging out mines approximately 800 metres from that position.

13. UNDOF observed five locations where tents and other structures had been set up for internally displaced persons in the area of separation and in proximity to the area. Approximately 70 tents were observed north-west of Aishah village, straddling the ceasefire line close to United Nations position 80. UNDOF observed water tanks and limited infrastructure in the vicinity of the tents and also regularly observed small groups of civilians in this camp. In another tented camp located in an area along the ceasefire line close to the village of Burayqah, approximately 155 tents, wooden structures and containers were observed. There were small numbers of civilians observed intermittently in the camp. UNDOF observed some 130 tents and wooden structures along the access road leading to United Nations observation post 53. A further 15 tents were observed at a location straddling the Bravo line north-west of the village of Ayn al-Qadi. A single tent was observed in the centre of

Kudnah close to the Bravo line. Owing to the closure of the established crossing point at Qunaytirah between the Alpha and Bravo sides since late August 2014, UNDOF is not in a position to facilitate, in cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross, humanitarian crossings, including for students, between the two sides.

14. Since its temporary relocation from a number of positions in September 2014 and pending the time when UNDOF returns fully to the area of separation, conditions permitting, UNDOF has continued to maintain visibility, albeit in a modified manner, of the area of separation and the ceasefire line from its positions on Mount Hermon and position 80 in the southern part of the area of separation, and position 22 on the Alpha side. UNDOF operations continued to be supported by United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) military observers in Observer Group Golan, who maintained five fixed and four temporary observation posts on the Alpha side. The focus of the activities of Observer Group Golan was on around-the-clock static observation and situational analysis. Through Observer Group Golan, UNDOF continued to carry out fortnightly inspections of equipment and force levels in the area of limitation on the Alpha side. Liaison officers from the Alpha side accompanied the inspection teams. Inspections and mobile operations in the area of limitation on the Bravo side remained suspended because of the security situation. As in the past, the Force faced restrictions on its freedom of movement, and its inspection teams were denied access to some positions on the Alpha side. The arrangements put in place by the Israel Defense Forces to reduce the delays in facilitating United Nations personnel crossing through the technical fence to observation posts 54 and 73 and position 80 eased the challenges experienced by United Nations personnel.

15. During the reporting period, United Nations personnel observed 155 mm artillery weapons on a number of occasions on the Alpha side within 10 kilometres of the ceasefire line, in positions and on flatbed trucks. Throughout February to April, there was a significant increase in missile carriers in the area of limitation. On 3 March, UNDOF personnel observed 9 M270 multiple-launch rocket systems at an Israel Defense Forces training area in the area of limitation on the Alpha side, with the number increasing to 12 on 11 March. In addition, on 14 April UNDOF personnel observed six M109 (155 mm artillery) self-propelled guns at an Israel Defense Forces position within the 10 km zone on the Alpha side.

16. UNDOF, in consultation with the parties, continued to review the situation in the area of separation to assess whether the conditions on the ground permit an incremental return to vacated positions in the area of separation. The ultimate objective of UNDOF is to return fully to the area of separation, conditions permitting. In recent months, UNDOF assessed that, although the situation in the area of separation remained volatile, the security situation in the northern part and most of the central part had improved. In keeping with the intent to return to vacated United Nations positions and Camp Faouar, UNDOF personnel carried out, on 2 and 3 March, 12 April and 2 May, further fact-finding missions to vacated United Nations positions 10, 16, 25, 31, 32 and observation posts 71 and 72 in the northern part of the area of separation and to Camp Faouar in the area of limitation on the Bravo side. There were no security incidents along the routes taken by UNDOF personnel to these United Nations facilities or at the United Nations facilities visited. UNDOF personnel found the security situation calm. However, in late May open sources reported clashes between the Syrian armed forces and

non-State armed opposition groups in the vicinity of Camp Faouar and supply route between Damascus and Camp Faouar. UNDOF personnel also found that, while the United Nations positions had sustained significant damage and showed signs of looting, some structures at the positions remained intact. A return to the positions would necessitate a significant amount of repairs and reconstruction.

17. In the light of the findings from the assessments by UNDOF, the Force is continuing its planning, with a view to returning incrementally to vacated United Nations facilities on the Bravo side, based on conditions on the ground. As an initial step, UNDOF is looking to return in a limited way to Camp Faouar, from which the Force would be able to carry out some observation and patrolling activities in the area of separation. Necessary construction and rehabilitation work at Camp Faouar is planned to start in June 2016. The limited return to Camp Foauar would involve the deployment of some 100 troops, associated force capabilities, including observation and force protection, and a limited civilian staff capacity. The Secretariat and UNDOF are working on the details, including the required capabilities, of that return. While the security situation in the northern part of the areas of separation and limitation on the Bravo side has been assessed by UNDOF as conducive to a return to Camp Faouar, the support of the parties is required to facilitate enhanced mandated activities and functions of UNDOF. The establishment by the parties of temporary crossing procedures when and if needed for UNDOF personnel between the Alpha and Bravo sides remains critical. The agreement of the parties to the Force's use of technology, including technological enablers to enhance observation and monitoring of the area of separation and the ceasefire line and capabilities to enhance force protection, is essential. It is also important that UNDOF possess the appropriate Force capabilities to increase its operations on the Bravo side.

18. UNDOF continued to resupply its positions on Mount Hermon from Damascus. UNDOF convoys between Damascus and the Mount Hermon positions are conducted almost daily and with an UNDOF security escort, accompanied by a liaison officer from the office of the Senior Syrian Arab Delegate. UNDOF continued to carry out contingency planning for the reinforcement and evacuation of United Nations positions and observation posts and to update its contingency planning for the relocation and evacuation of United Nations personnel on both the Alpha and Bravo sides, as well as in Damascus. UNDOF, through its Force Reserve Company, conducted regular rehearsals, exercises and training for all identified contingencies. UNDOF and Observer Group Golan continued regular evacuation and reinforcement exercises and contingency planning.

19. UNDOF continued its efforts to strengthen its positions and presence in the Mount Hermon area. The infrastructure works and groundworks at positions 12 and 12A continued, with improvements to force protection measures, power supply, communications and real-life support. Enhancements at United Nations position 80, including additional force protection measures, continued.

20. The implementation of risk mitigation measures, including force protection measures recommended in the military capability study of UNDOF, continued at observation posts, positions and the operational base at Camp Ziouani. The Secretariat has made progress in the generation of the appropriate capabilities, including additional medical facilities and explosive ordnance disposal teams recommended in the study to support the UNDOF positions on Mount Hermon and

position 80, as well as additional protected mobility for Mount Hermon positions. Additional force protection measures, including defensive positions and newly constructed force protection barriers, have been completed at United Nations positions 12A and 22. The UNDOF main headquarters at Yafour Hotel has been further upgraded in accordance with the risk mitigation measures recommended in the United Nations security risk assessment.

21. As at 8 May 2016, UNDOF comprised 786 troops, including 23 women. Troops are currently deployed from Bhutan (2), the Czech Republic (3), Fiji (293), India (191), Ireland (138), Nepal (157) and the Netherlands (2). In addition, 70 military observers from UNTSO, including 2 female observers, assisted the Force in carrying out its tasks.

III. Financial aspects

22. By its resolution 69/301, the General Assembly appropriated the amount of $51.7 million for the maintenance of UNDOF for the period from 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2016.

23. As at 18 May 2016, unpaid assessed contributions to the Special Account for UNDOF amounted to $17.7 million. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations as at that date amounted to $2,233.8 million.

24. Reimbursement of troop costs has been made for the period up to 31 January 2016, while reimbursement of the costs of contingent-owned equipment has been made for the period up to 31 December 2015, in accordance with the quarterly payment schedule.

IV. Implementation of Security Council resolution 338 (1973)

25. The Security Council, when deciding in its resolution 2257 (2015) to renew the mandate of UNDOF for a further period of six months, until 30 June 2016, called upon the parties concerned to immediately implement its resolution 338 (1973) and requested the Secretary-General to submit, at the end of the period, a report on developments in the situation and the measures taken to implement that resolution. The search for a peaceful settlement in the Middle East, in particular the efforts made at various levels to implement resolution 338 (1973), was dealt with in my report on the situation in the Middle East (A/70/353), submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 69/24 on Jerusalem and 69/25 on the Syrian Golan.

26. Since the discontinuation of indirect peace talks in December 2008, there have been no negotiations between the parties. The Syrian conflict is further reducing the prospects for their resumption and for progress towards peace between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic. I look forward to a peaceful resolution of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic and the resumption of efforts towards a comprehensive, just and durable peace settlement, as called for by the Security Council in its resolution 338 (1973) and other relevant resolutions.

V. Observations

27. I am gravely concerned about the violations of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement. The continued exchange of gunfire between the Syrian armed forces and non-State armed opposition groups, and the continued fighting between different armed groups, including the listed terrorist group Nusrah Front, in the southern part of the areas of separation and limitation on the Bravo side jeopardize the long-held ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic. The mandate of UNDOF remains an important element in ensuring the stability of the region. For its part, the United Nations will spare no efforts in ensuring that the long-held ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic continues to hold.

28. A statement of the Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, on 17 April, when he convened a cabinet meeting in the Golan, that Israel would never leave the Golan adds further to the potential for escalated tensions. On 18 April, I reminded Israel of its obligation to implement pertinent resolutions on the Golan. On 26 April, the Security Council members unanimously deplored the convening of the Israeli cabinet in the Golan and public statements calling upon the international community to recognize the annexation of the Golan by Israel, noting the continuing legal validity of resolution 497 (1981).

29. I am deeply concerned by the continuing deterioration of the security situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, its impact on the Syrian population and its potential implications for the stability of the region. These developments have continued to affect significantly the UNDOF area of operation. The presence of the Syrian armed forces and unauthorized military equipment in the area of separation are violations of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement. The increased use of heavy weapons by the Syrian armed forces and armed groups, including listed terrorist groups, in the continuing Syrian conflict is disturbing. I note that, while the reduction in the levels of firing continues in the northern part of the UNDOF area of operation, listed terrorist groups and other armed groups continue to maintain control over significant sections of the areas of separation and limitation of the UNDOF area of operation. The established crossing between the Alpha and Bravo sides remains closed.

30. There should be no military forces in the area of separation other than those of UNDOF. I call upon all parties to the Syrian conflict to cease military actions throughout the country, including in the UNDOF area of operation, and to remove all military equipment and all armed personnel from the area of separation.

31. The Israel Defense Forces should cease to deploy unauthorized weapons and equipment in the area of limitation on the Alpha side. In addition, the firing of gunshots across the ceasefire line by Israel Defense Forces soldiers has the potential to escalate tensions between the two sides.

32. I remain concerned about the several incidents that have jeopardized United National personnel and facilities. Any hostile act against United Nations personnel, including threatening their physical safety, restricting their movement and direct and indirect firing at United Nations personnel and facilities by anyone, is unacceptable. I reiterate that all military activities in the area of separation conducted by any actor pose a risk to the ceasefire and to the local civilian population, in addition to the United Nations personnel on the ground. I call upon all parties to take all measures necessary to protect civilians.

33. As UNDOF moves forward with its planning to commence a limited return to Camp Faouar and to intensify its operations in the area of separation, it becomes critical that the safety and security of United Nations personnel be assured. I call upon the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to fulfil its primary responsibility for the safety and security of United Nations personnel in the areas of separation and limitation on the Bravo side. I also call upon countries with influence to strongly and urgently convey to the non-State armed opposition groups in the UNDOF area of operation the need to cease any actions in violation of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement that jeopardize the safety and security of United Nations personnel and to accord United Nations personnel the freedom to carry out their mandate safely and securely. The safety and security of United Nations personnel must be ensured.

34. The continued presence of UNDOF in the area remains essential. Both Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic have stated their continued commitment to the Disengagement of Forces Agreement and support for the presence of UNDOF in calling for a return to vacated positions. The full return of UNDOF to the area of separation remains a priority for the mission. In the planning for the return, the safety and security of United Nations personnel is the primary consideration in determining the exact modalities. I note the positive developments in relation to the strategic intent of UNDOF to return incrementally to Camp Faouar and gradually increase its operations in the area of separation, conditions permitting. The Secretariat supports UNDOF in this endeavour. I call upon both parties to assist UNDOF in order for the mission to move the planning forward. As a matter of priority, established efficient temporary procedures for the crossing of UNDOF personnel between the Alpha and Bravo sides in the absence of the crossing at Qunaytirah and technology and equipment to enhance the mission's observation of the area of separation and the ceasefire line and to improve force protection are necessary. It remains critical that, at the same time, the parties continue to support the enhancement of the liaison function of UNDOF.

35. It is equally critical that the Security Council continue to bring its influence to bear on the parties concerned to ensure that UNDOF is accorded the ability to operate in a safe and secure manner and freely. It is essential that UNDOF continue to have at its disposal all means and resources necessary to allow it to return fully to the area of separation, as the situation permits.

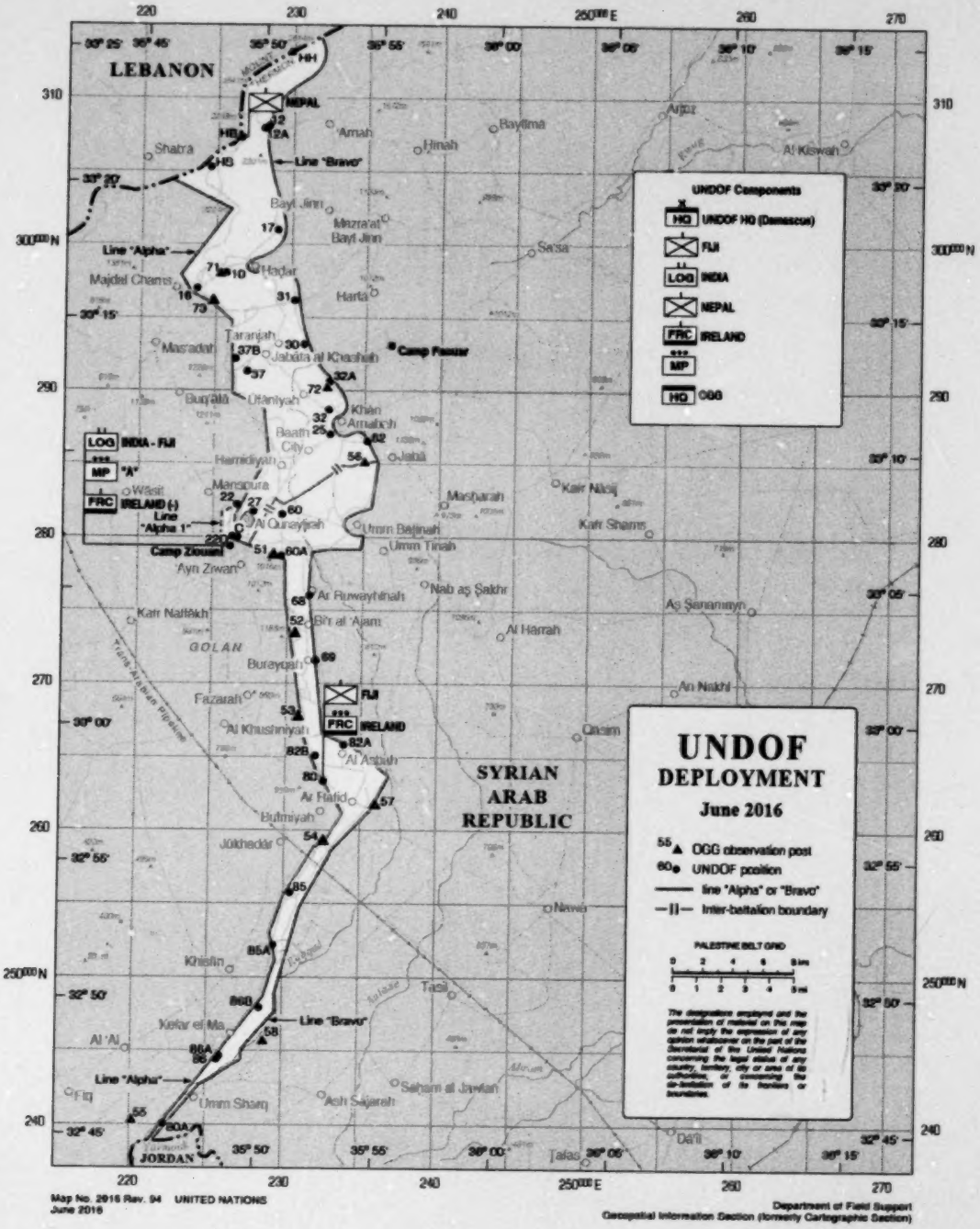
36. The confidence and commitment of troop-contributing countries in UNDOF remain a key factor for the mission's ability to continue to carry out its mandate. I continue to count on the support of troop-contributing countries as UNDOF continues with its planning, including in relation to the augmentation of required capabilities, in preparation for the planned limited return to vacated positions in the area of separation. I am grateful to the Governments of Bhutan, the Czech Republic, Fiji, India, Ireland, Nepal and the Netherlands for their contributions, their commitment and their resolve. I am also thankful to the Member States contributing military observers to UNTSO.

37. Under the prevailing circumstances, I consider the continued presence of UNDOF in the area to be essential. I therefore recommend that the Security Council extend the mandate of the Force for a further period of six months, until 31 December 2016. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic has given its

assent to the proposed extension. The Government of Israel has also expressed its agreement.

38. In conclusion, I wish to express my appreciation to the Head of Mission and Force Commander, Major General Jai Shanker Menon, and the military and civilian personnel serving under his leadership, who continue to perform the important tasks assigned to them by the Security Council with efficiency and commitment under challenging circumstances. I have full confidence that UNDOF will continue to use its best efforts to carry out its mission.

Annex


LEBANON
SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC
JORDAN
GOLAN
UNDOF
DEPLOYMENT
June 2016
UNDOF Components
HQ UNDOF HQ (Damascus)
FIJI
LOG INDIA
NEPAL
FRC IRELAND
MP
HQ OGG
LOG INDIA - FIJI
MP "A"
FRC IRELAND (-)
Line "Alpha 1"
Camp Ziouani
Camp Faouar
Line "Alpha"
Line "Bravo"
55 OGG observation post
60 UNDOF position
line "Alpha" or "Bravo"
Inter-battalion boundary
PALESTINE BELT GRID
Map No. 2916 Rev. 94 UNITED NATIONS
June 2016
Department of Field Support
Geospatial Information Section (formerly Cartographic Section)